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ABSTRACT

Intended for regular class teachers, the booklet provides information to aid in mainstreaming the mentally retarded (MR) child. Sections address the following areas: reasons for mainstreaming the MR student; definition of mental retardation; assessment (areas of assessment and suggested evaluation measures, the assessment team); suggested readings for teachers and students on the retarded; personalized curricula (suggestions for instruction relating to intellectual functioning, abstract thinking, language development, physical maturation, short term memory, attention span, and self concept); and general teaching techniques for the MR child. (SBH)

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If we can raise a generation
That accepts those of us who are different. . .
On the basis of what we can do. . .
Then
We will have come a long way
Toward equality of opportunity.
. . .Integration is needed in order to fully educate the non-handicapped
As well as the handicapped."

S. Phyllis Stearner

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Gayle Gear

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

MATT: The Mentally Retarded Child in Your Classroom

prepared by

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What we are talking about is mainstreaming, a term you've heard a lot about. For you it is a unique opportunity to experience a whole new facet of teaching. Mainstreaming satisfies the educational needs of handicapped children. At the same time, it is providing a challenging learning situation for both teachers and students. You, the regular education teacher, will gain new insights into children and discover a different aspect of learning that will be both fascinating and personally rewarding.

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I remember when Matt came to my classroom. The school counselor told me this was his third school change since the beginning of the term. It seems his mother was a domestic and job opportunities hadn't been very good lately. No one mentioned his father. She also said that he might have some learning problems, and she wanted me to observe him closely.

He arrived after the tardy bell had rung. I asked him why he was late, and he replied in a soft voice, "I don't know room number." He was a handsome boy, a little small for his age. His clothes were clean, although his jacket was too short and was buttoned haphazardly and his tennis shoes were untied. I pointed to a desk where he could sit. He walked slowly toward it, dropping several of his books on the way. Some of the students nodded, "Hello," but Matt did not respond.

I handed out the enrollment cards and gave Matt a pencil. His writing was neat, but he seemed to have trouble fitting the information into the right spaces. He kept glancing around to see what the other children were writing. He couldn't remember his zip code or his new telephone number.

I distributed a pretest. After a few minutes of watching the other students tackle their mimeographed sheets, Matt slowly began to work. His lips moved as he sounded out the first question; he shook his head, then tried the next. I settled down at my desk to look over the daily school bulletin. Soon a shadow fell over the words I was reading. There stood Matt, putting his paper on my desk. "Have you finished, Matt? You've only been working ten minutes." He grabbed the sheet, crumpled it and shouted, "I hate this class. I want out of it!"

I looked at his frustrated, angry face and had no response for him. "What," I thought, "do I do now?

For several days Matt and I waged a kind of silent battle against the common enemy — frustration. My frustration came from doggedly trying techniques that weren't working. Matt's reactions resulted from knowing he couldn't fulfill my expectations. I concluded that many problems were hampering success for Matt, but I decided to focus on only two areas: a constant scrutiny of my techniques, with a willingness to change, adapt, create, until I found what worked for Matt; and a patient push to instill in him that spark of belief that says, "I CAN do it!"

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Why might the mentally retarded child be placed in your classroom?

The needs and desires of mentally handicapped children are similar to those of all children. They strive, as all children do, for a happy family life, for warm friendships, for individual achievement, for fulfilling work opportunities, and for enjoyable recreation. Indeed, all youngsters share common goals: to think effectively, to act independently, and to have access to satisfying life experiences. Educational aims for exceptional students are basically those of other students. They, too, must be prepared academically, socially, and vocationally to cope with the pressures and duties of adulthood.

Until recently, the self-contained special education class was considered the most suitable educational setting for mentally retarded children. Yet, it was found that, with improved instructional techniques and with the availability of support services, Matt, and many children with similar learning needs, could be more effectively taught in the regular classroom.

The regular classroom is, in most instances, the environment in which the mentally retarded child will benefit most from instruction and from interaction with his peers. Consequently, teachers now work with specialists to modify their teaching techniques and to provide necessary related services so that these children can be included in the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible. To assure success for the mentally retarded children who may be in your classroom, it is essential that you be aware of their special learning needs, suitable teaching techniques for their instruction, and resources available to assist you.

I believed in the concept of mainstreaming. I guess that's why I was so determined to make it work. I knew that sometimes when kids are put in special classes they are stigmatized, and it makes it harder for them.

I had read about mental retardation and what it was supposed to mean. But watching Matt, I realized that the effects of retardation vary, and that I must respond to Matt's unique needs.

What is meant by the term "mental retardation"?

The following definition was proposed by the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD):

"**Mental retardation** refers to

Mental retardation refers to current behaviors and does not imply that children so classified will always function as intellectually impaired. Scores obtained in assessment and behaviors observed during evaluations can alter due to motivation, fatigue, emotional problems, and cultural differences.

significantly subaverage

The current educational classification systems use the terms educable mentally retarded for children whose IQ(WISC-R) range is between 50 and 75, trainable mentally retarded for those with IQ's between 25 and 49, and profoundly retarded for those children with an IQ below 25. The trainable mentally retarded can be taught functional academics emphasizing self-help and occupational skills.

intellectual functioning

Intellectual functioning must be measured by one or more of the standardized tests developed for this purpose. An IQ score two standard deviations below the mean, or below 70, indicates significantly subaverage intelligence. Approximately 3% of the population of the United States score below 70 on the WISC-R or Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.

existing concurrently with

Existing concurrently means that a person is not considered to be mentally retarded unless there is sufficient evidence of both significantly subaverage intelligence and deficits in adaptive behavior.

deficits in **adaptive behavior,**

Adaptive behavior refers to the amount of personal, social, and occupational independence the child exhibits in relation to his age or cultural group. The young child might have problems in perceptual-motor development, self-help skills, communication abilities, and social skills. Children of school age who are considered to be mildly retarded may be experiencing difficulties learning to read, write, compute, and express themselves verbally. Young adults may not be able to cope vocationally.

and manifested during

the developmental period."

The developmental period refers to the period of growth between birth and 18 years of age.

It was obvious right away that Matt had trouble with reading although he tried to act as if it weren't important at all. He could read a sentence if it was by itself on a page, but he could not read the same sentence if it appeared in a paragraph. Also, he read with his hands, pressing his finger hard into the page as if to keep the words from moving.

You, the classroom teacher, are usually the first person to notice that a child has special learning needs. Perhaps the child cannot read, or he reads at a lower level than his age-mates. Your anecdotal records indicate that the child is not adapting to many classroom procedures. You have observed that he is easily distracted, is often frustrated, and is developing a chronic history of failure, both academically and socially. You maintain an observational checklist to assess gross motor skills, eye-hand coordination, ability to follow directions, and language responses. You realize the regular curriculum and your teaching strategies must be altered, but how? For additional information, you seek the assistance of members of the assessment team in determining the child's special learning requirements.

Identification of mentally handicapped children may be necessary to obtain funding benefits, to secure special education services, and to receive necessary supportive help. It should never be used for labeling, nor should it be perceived as a permanently unalterable human condition. Various criteria for eligibility include measures of intellectual functioning, academic achievement, social maturity, and adaptive skills. Information derived from appropriately-selected diagnostic instruments is used to adjust curricula to the needs of the child. Therefore, only tests that lead to specific instructional procedures and materials should be chosen. The following chart lists some of the assessment instruments that might be utilized.

ASSESSMENT

AREA OF ASSESSMENT	SUGGESTED EVALUATIONS
Academic Aptitude	**Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale** This is an individually-administered intelligence test which yields an IQ. The child answers items until he or she misses a certain number of consecutive items, thus reaching a "ceiling." The 1960 revision of the Sanford-Binet included minorities in the standardization population in an effort to reduce cultural bias. **Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)** In its revised edition, WISC-R, this standardized intelligence test gives separate IQ scores for a verbal scale, performance scale, and total scale. The verbal scale includes six subtests: information, comprehension, arithmetic, similarities, vocabulary, and digit span. Performance subtests include: picture completion, picture arrangement, block design, object assembly, coding, and mazes.
Academic Achievement	**Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)** This achievement test includes two subtests, covering spelling and mathematics, which can be administered to a group; and one, covering reading recognition, that must be individually administered. It can be used for people of all ages. Three kinds of scores are available: grade ratings, percentiles, and standard scores. **Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT)** This individually-administered test provides scores for mathematics, reading recognition, reading comprehension, spelling, and general information, as well as a total test score. It can be used with children from kindergarten through age 12.

Language Development	**Sequenced Inventory of Communication Development** This instrument is used to evaluate a preschool child's language development in receptive language, expressive language, grammar, and speech.
Social Maturity	**Vineland Social Maturity Scale** This standardized scale is administered through an interview with a person who knows the child well. The examiner determines basal and ceiling ages from which a social quotient is derived. The tasks studied are divided into six areas: self-help, self-direction, locomotion, occupation, communication, and socialization. It can be used from infancy through adulthood.
Adaptive Skills	**AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale** This scale is intended to provide objective descriptions and evaluations of how effectively an individual copes with environmental demands. Part One relates to personal independence in daily living; Part Two focuses on maladaptive behaviors related to personality and behavior disorders. An informed observer fills out the scale or obtains information through an interview. A profile, rather than a single score, is obtained.
Behavioral Rating	**Pupil Rating Scale** This is a standardized rating scale with five behavioral categories: auditory comprehension, spoken language, orientation, behavior, and motor skills. Each category includes several specific items, and the classroom teacher rates the student from 1 to 5 on each item.

Before any formal assessment is initiated, rapport must be established with the child. He must understand when he is being tested, what is expected of him, and why he should work at maximum capacity. If he is uncomfortable, anxious, or hesitant to respond because he anticipates failure, he will not perform well and the results will not be valid.

Once you and the assessment team have identified the child's particular needs and have planned appropriate educational strategies, you can begin to implement the recommendations. Of course, this stage may require further consultation with members of the team. Assessment should be an ongoing process, providing current information easily and quickly to adapt for continuing educational decision-making. While **you** plan and direct most of the educational activities, the mental retardation specialist acts as a supportive resource person, sharing and interpreting information, answering questions, offering suggestions, and supplying special materials to you. In fact, everyone on the assessment team shares responsibility for providing the instructional program and the supportive climate necessary for the intellectually impaired to accomplish two essential things: meet instructional objectives and develop a positive self-image. These two are really inseparable, for how the child values himself has a great influence on his performance. You will be able to encourage him to learn despite his handicap. Your genuine enthusiasm for his success will be a tremendous positive support for his view of himself and his abilities.

I asked the rescurce teacher to observe Matt. I liked her right away because she didn't just sit back and take notes; she got involved with all the children and suggested some ideas I might try. As she left, she smiled and said, "You know, together, I think we can really do something for Matt." We soon developed a close working relationship. We were able to talk honestly about which techniques did or did not work. Results: Matt improved a great deal and I made a new friend.

I also learned to become more sensitive to the feelings of all the students in my class. I noticed that some of the other kids had become hesitant about asking for help. When I asked one of them, Suzi, why this was so, her head dropped and she answered, "Because we don't want the other kids to call us retarded, like Matt." That day, I went to the library and checked out some books for us to read. We all learned a little more about ourselves and about Matt.

BOOKS FOR YOU TO READ

Bookbinder, Susan R. **Mainstreaming: What Every Child Needs to Know About Disabilities.** Exceptional Parent, 1978.

Braginsky, D. D. & Braginsky, B. M. **Hansels & Gretels.** New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Charles, C. M. **Individualizing Instruction.** St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1976.

Gillespie, P. H. and Johnson, L. **Teaching Reading to the Mildly Retarded Child.** Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1974.

Long, Kate. **Johnny's Such a Bright Boy, What a Shame He's Retarded.** Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977.

Peterson, Daniel. **Functional Mathmetics for the Mentally Retarded.** Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1974.

BOOKS FOR YOUR STUDENTS TO READ

Christopher, Matt. **Long Shot for Paul.** Archway, 1974.

Crane, Caroline. **A Girl Like Tracy.** David McKay Co., Inc., 1966.

Doorly, R., and Boudreau, K. **Our Jimmy.** Services Associates, 1967.

Klein, Gerda. **The Blue Rose.** Lawrence Hill & Co., 1974.

Wrightson, Patricia. **A Racehorse for Andy.** Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1968.

OTHER RESOURCES

1. American Association on Mental Deficiency
   5201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
   Washington, D.C. 20015

2. The Council for Exceptional Children
   1920 Association Drive
   Reston, Virginia 22091

3. National Association for Retarded Citizens
   2709 Avenue E, East
   Arlington, Texas 76011

4. Closer Look
   National Information Center for the Handicapped
   1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
   Washington, D. C. 20037

5. National Center on Educational Media
   and Materials for the Handicapped
   The Ohio State University
   Columbus, Ohio 43210

6. National Rehabilitation Association
   1522 K Street, N.W.
   Washington, D. C. 20005

You may observe certain learning patterns that seem a little different in the mentally retarded child — really more a matter of degree than of uniqueness. For instance . . .

INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING

You may notice . . . . . .The child appears to be somewhat slower than other children in developing readiness for, and then mastering, academic tasks. He is not able to keep pace and falls increasingly behind as the school years accumulate. Although both capacity to learn and rate of learning do not seem equal to those of the so-called "average" child, this youngster **is** able to learn. It just takes longer.

What you can do . . . . . .Concentrate upon developing language and readiness skills until the child approximates the characteristics of an average six-year-old. Many techniques used in kindergarten programs are helpful. A diagnostic-prescriptive approach to instruction will allow the youngster to attain specific skills and to progress at a rate that encourages success. There are many excellent prescriptive educational programs available that can be tailored to meet the child's individual needs. Your assessment team and your special education resource personnel will be able to help you.

Often, this youngster's preschool experiences have been limited. Enrichment in experiential areas is most appropriate. Community visits, cultural information-sharing, demonstrations, and field visits are great opportunities for growth.

Reminder . . . . . .Influenced by his slower intellectual responses, we may overlook this child's keen sensitivity to his surroundings. He seems to know intuitively when others accept him or only tolerate him. If he is rejected at home, he relies even more upon the school for his basic human needs, especially for praise and for love. He enjoys being valued for what he can do rather than being remembered for what he cannot accomplish.

ABSTRACT THINKING

You may notice . . . . . . The youngster performs better when your instructional approach is concrete, when he has materials he can manipulate, and when the tasks involve little need for abstraction. Rules, principles, and generalizations are troublesome. Abstract concepts such as a number, an operation, a feeling, or a belief are difficult to understand. Higher level cognitive skills, such as Piaget's formal operations, are usually beyond his grasp. These realities are sometimes discouraging to teachers, until they accept and circumvent them through individualized teaching methods.

What you can do . . . . . . Improve the student's ability to handle practical cognitive tasks. By carefully sequencing materials, by proceeding slowly from the simple to the more complex, and by using concrete examples and materials, you will be able to expand his grasp of the world around him. For example, when he understands how his family or immediate community functions, he may be led to understand how larger societies operate. After he learns to accept rules at school, he can begin to understand how similar rules may be necessary for people to live peacefully in society. To explore abstract arithmetic concepts, he might practice budgeting his money, taking inventory of his personal belongings, and measuring distances to school.

These children seem to remember what they **should not** do much more readily than what they should do. To counter this tendency, always stress the **positive** in your discipline and in your approaches to learning.

Reminder . . . . . .Strong reinforcement has to be offered to increase the child's ability to understand abstractions.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

You may notice . . . . . . The child may speak in single words or in starkly simple sentences. "I" centers most of his verbal exchanges. Conversation does not interest him very much. He loses the point and is confused by modifiers, prepositions, and directional words (under/over). He observes very little detail around him. He sees trees in the school yard, but he may not notice the branches or the leaves. Abstract terms may be beyond his scope. Comparisons of size, shape, or color are difficult. When learning to identify written symbols, he transfers very little from one situation to another. He may know c-a-n but still can't say p-a-n. Symbolic language, the basis of problem-solving, really baffles him. School means "reading, writing, communicating" to everyone around him. This youngster struggles, yet is not able to grasp any of these ideas very easily.

Parents may discuss with you the student's delay in learning to speak during his infancy and his tendency to use gestures or grunts to make wishes known.

What you can do . . . . . . Since language is the area in which failure experiences are most likely to occur, you will want to concentrate upon this aspect of his learning. These skills can be developed with appropriate drill and reinforcement.

Speak simply, concretely, and explicitly. Explain with illustrations from the child's actual life experiences. Emphasize details, even when they seem obvious. Have the child use every sense — seeing, hearing, touching, handling, tasting — when introducing new tasks. Let him jump over and

crawl under things, or find the smallest ball. Write a word; say it aloud; have the youngster trace it, pronounce it, use it in context. As he manipulates objects, require that he verbalize what he is doing. Make puppets, tell stories, put on plays, "see and tell". Introduce a few new words each day; review those already learned. Remember your 3 R's . . . repeat, repeat, repeat.

Many excellent language development kits, audio-visual aids, and prescriptive programmed instruction systems are available. Seek help from your resource people.

Reminder . . . . . .Thinking **is** symbolic language. School achievement depends largely on language skills. Personal and social relationships flourish by verbal interchange. Successful employment requires communication. Your participation in helping this student improve verbally will enrich every facet of his life.

PHYSICAL MATURATION

You may notice . . . . . .This child's physical maturation approximates that of a normal child. Yet crawling, walking, running, skipping, and jumping were probably difficult motor responses for his body to learn. He may often appear a little uncoordinated and somewhat clumsy. Learning to print, to write, to paint, to operate machines, to participate in sports may require tremendous effort and extensive training.

What you can do . . . . . .Experts identify four basic motor patterns: (1) balance and maintenance of posture; (2) locomotion; (3) contact; (4) contact with a moving object. Teachers often refer to "eye-hand coordination" or fine and gross motor skill development. No matter how you label it, there are many techniques that will greatly improve motor activity patterns. Many problems can be overcome with practice and special approaches. Appropriate play equipment, balance boards, modified physical education programs, prescribed perceptual motor exercises, dancing, and rhythm games are beneficial. You may wish to obtain suggestions and help from your resource team.

Reminder . . . . . .When handicapped children are provided with a program aimed at developing simple motor skills and are given opportunities to practice them, they often perform at a level commensurate with that of their age-mates.

VISUAL AND AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION

You may notice . . . . . .The child is experiencing difficulty in identifying shapes, colors, symbols, and sounds. For example, he may not recognize letters of the alphabet, hear the beginning sound of a word, locate the triangle, or find the larger or smaller object.

What you can do . . . . . .Make sure the materials you use are free from distortion or ambiguities. Have the child's attention. Reinforce success immediately. You may relate the reinforcer to a specific task such as, "Keep all of the round, black, hard candies you can find."

Use all channels of reception (eyes, ears, nose, skin). Initially, have the child perform one task at a time, e.g., find the circles. Distribute practice periods throughout the school day. Remember always to proceed carefully from the **simple** to the **complex.**

Ask your assessment team to assist you in locating and creating materials for learning activities and reinforcement.

Reminder . . . . . .Growth in this area influences success in many fields — language acquisition, gross and fine motor dexterity, reading, writing, and mathematics.

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

You may notice . . . . . .The child has trouble remembering information for immediate recall. This tendency seems more pronounced when there is any kind of distraction or interference. A laugh, a bell, or pages turning may result in a total memory lapse. Also, if the connection between facts is vague or complex, retention declines. In contrast, **long-term memory** is not so difficult, especially when "overlearning" and appropriate reinforcement have taken place. Overlearning, a term special educators often use, is simply "practicing the task beyond initial mastery."

What you can do . . . . . .Whenever possible, eliminate irrelevant stimuli as these impede short-term retention. Have the child practice memory skills frequently. Incidentally, practicing does not have to be dull. Just a little variation revives interest and motivation to succeed. Reinforce frequently but cautiously, remembering that too much anticipation of a reward may interfere. Reinforcement, therefore, should be low-keyed.

Reminder . . . . . .Since learning new tasks and concepts depends so heavily upon short-term memory, emphasis on this area is particularly helpful.

ATTENTION SPAN

You may notice . . . . . .The youngster usually exhibits shorter spans of attention than most of his classmates. In fact, his focus may wander from activities he finds especially interesting! Even minor distractions disrupt him. It is difficult to get his attention and to hold it.

What you can do . . . . . .Reduce extraneous stimuli by sectioning off the room, seating the child away from doors and windows, and establishing patterns of work the youngster recognizes as being relevant for him. Use strong stimuli. In the beginning, reward attending behavior immediately. Eye contact, termination of other activities, a "listening" posture indicate that you have captured his attention. Responding must be made profitable to him. With practice, this behavior can be more easily secured and its span may be lengthened.

Reminder . . . . . .The student's attention is required before any learning can take place.

SELF-CONCEPT

You may notice . . . . . . This child needs attention, affection, acceptance, and success just like everyone else. He worries about fitting into his social group and about being treated differently because he lacks some basic skills. He may be so afraid of rejection that he will tend to avoid social situations. If he has not had many chances to succeed at home and at school, and if he sees himself as inadequate, he conditions himself to expect that new experiences will end in yet another defeat. School may be perceived by such a child as an alien, uncomfortable place. To cope, he may withdraw, daydream, engage in disruptive behavior, or become openly aggressive.

What you can do . . . . Provide the child with attainable instructional and developmental goals. Select activities that will increase his feelings of self-worth and chances of success. Help him develop techniques for controlling impulsive behavior. Reduce his level of frustration. Model and reinforce positive social and personal concepts. Behavior is changed by consequences, so behavior modification techniques may be very useful. Guide the other children to value this classmate by praising his contributions. While the child is not present, you can assist the class in understanding his fears, hopes, and needs. Many excellent books, movies, and kits on the subject of mental retardation can be obtained.

Reminder . . . . . . How the child perceives himself influences every experience that he has.

Matt worked diligently on his reading. I set up the program so he could keep track of his progress. He was beginning to think, "I can do it!" I was, too.

As I continued working with Matt, I noticed that some of the other children had similar problems. I began using many of the same techniques with them. I noticed something about myself, too — I was gaining confidence in my ability to work with certain kinds of difficulties. And I was seeing more and more possibilites . . .

SUMMING UP . . .

1. **Be kind, yet firm and consistent.** These children have trouble setting limits and often cannot function well in an unstructured environment. They must know what is expected of them, what behavior is acceptable, and what is not allowed. Rules have to be clearly stated and consistently reinforced.

2. **Be brief and direct.** Too many words confuse. Lacking the discrimination ability to select important information, the youngster often resorts to mimicking his classmates' responses, giving up, or using trial and error solutions.

3. **Proceed from the concrete to the abstract.** Mentally retarded children think in concrete terms. Life is primarily what they can see, hear, taste, or feel. Abstraction and symbolic thought **can** be taught, but these are more complicated tasks. Opportunities should be provided to manipulate objects in diverse ways. All senses should be utilized. For instance, fractional concepts may be learned by having a child see, smell, touch, and handle pieces of apple, by having him draw and cut out paper designs, or by having him color and manipulate pie segments.

4. **Advance one small step at a time.** With these students' history of poor listening skills, easy confusion, and inadequate memory for detail, it is easier to start with one simple direction; allow the child to respond, then add the next step. After a time, behavior can be shaped to allow more complicated instructions.

5. **Provide many short, but frequent, repetitions.** Overlearning is the key to success. Many short repetitions of a task during the school day are better than long periods of drill. The practicing does not need to be too time-consuming or elaborate. Games, songs, kits, and work-bench activities are useful reinforcers for younger students. Older pupils can benefit from specially-designed puzzles, informal quizzing, contests, and programmed instruction.

6. **Anticipate highs and lows.** Learning for all children is characterized by spurts and plateaus. These seem even more characteristic of children with special learning problems. Rapid ups-and-downs are frequently set into motion by outside forces which do not affect normal children as markedly. Minor distractions often cause total loss of attention and motivation. Offering some simple reinforcements may result in tremendous increases in interest and understanding. Through careful observation, the teacher can utilize her insights by providing opportunities for individual growth.

7. **Limit the amount of work and length of work periods.** One frequent response of regular classroom teachers is, "The mentally retarded student cannot work independently. How can I attend to him without neglecting everyone else?" Yet, these children can be taught to be self-sufficient! By the use of techniques such as gearing assignments to a specific time goal and gradually offering feedback and reinforcement, attention periods can be shaped and lengthened. Additionally, the child will enjoy "cushion" activities, such as listening to music with earphones, coloring, playing games, and clay modeling. Often he will work quietly with these until his classmates have finished their assignments.

SUMMING UP . . .

8. **Do not allow the child to practice his errors.** Many children with learning problems tend to repeat the same errors unless the pattern is broken. Once a mistake is initiated, chances are it will recur throughout the total assignment and must be unlearned before progress can be made. Monitor the child's performance until he gets started correctly; then recheck as frequently as possible.

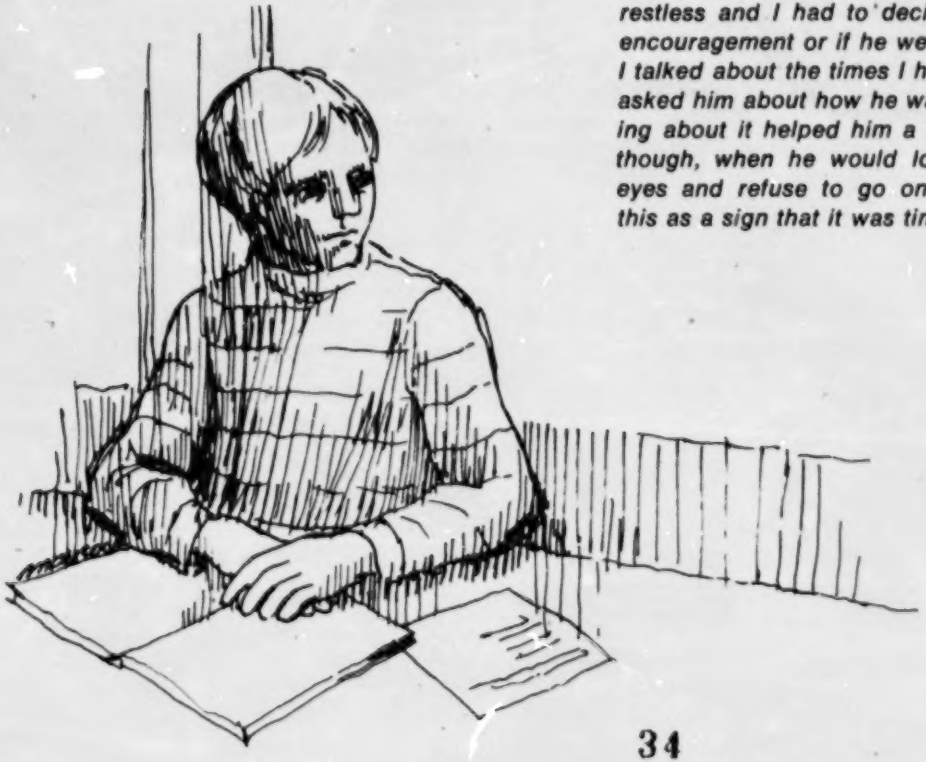
9. **Offer immediate feedback. Be specific.** If the answer is wrong, tell the student what is wrong. When a certain behavior is being taught (sitting still, for instance), praise him when he is still, but be specific and tell him why the behavior is appropriate.

10. **If your approach does not work, alter it.** Flexibility is an absolute necessity. If you are unable to meet objectives after a reasonable exposure, make a change; analyze what has gone wrong and what alternatives can be offered.

11. **Be positive.** Instead of saying, "No free time until arithmetic is completed," try, "As soon as arithmetic is done, you may have free time." Positive approaches result in a better learning environment.

12. **Organize and manage.** With several handicapped children in your class, finding time to deal with their special needs requires a great deal of planning and innovating. Be sure to utilize all resources that are available, including resource specialists, peer tutors, and volunteers.

As the weeks went by I learned more and more about how to work with Matt. I learned to overteach but not to overload. At times he became restless and I had to decide if he needed more encouragement or if he were just plain frustrated. I talked about the times I had been frustrated and asked him about how he was feeling inside. Talking about it helped him a lot. There were times, though, when he would look at me with empty eyes and refuse to go on. I learned to accept this as a sign that it was time for a break.



I told Matt that I was very pleased with his progress and that I would like to talk with his mother. The next day he came to school with a note from her:

Dear Mrs. Simpson,

I can't come to see you because of my job. But I had to thank you for the good work you've done with my son Matt. He reads to me at night and he looks so proud. I am proud too. I always knew he could learn, and it makes me so happy to see that he finally knows it too . . .

As I read the note I thought back to the first day Matt came to class. I had wondered then what I would do and if I could do it. Now I understand the pride Matt feels, for when I think about his accomplishment, I realize that, in a way, it's mine too.